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Approved For Release 2000/08/29 : CIA-RDP79R00890A000800050015-8

ABC BRIEFING

5 March 1957

TEA ISLAND

I. First Thai elections in five years proved to be heady experience in democracy for Bangkok public. Then vote-rigging--for which police director general Phao was presumably responsible--became too blatant, crowds rioted and government declared "state of emergency" 2 March.

A. Although Bangkok's 9 assembly seats hotly contested, 7 gov't candidates were declared victors.

B. Voting marked by stuffed ballot boxes, fraudulent tabulation: in one 3,000-strong precinct, 8,000 votes counted.

II. Major importance of affair is chance it gives Army Chief Sarit to dispose of his strongest rival, Phao.

A. Sarit--given command of police for duration of emergency--appears emerging from crisis as "hero;" he reported pressing for Phao's ouster as scapegoat.

B. Sarit frankly told student demonstrators that elections were dishonest; jovially said he wished he could join protest but feared possibility of arrest as subversive if he did.

C. Phao now appears under heavy cloud: reportedly stripped of authority and turning to bottle for consolation.

III. Neither Thai boss, Premier Phibun, nor pro-West orientation of Thailand likely to suffer.

A. Subversion, Commie influence in demonstrations negligible.

B. Premier Phibun, in past, however, has sought maintain balance power between Sarit and Phao as matter of personal expediency: restoration of such balance may prove difficult now.

DOCUMENT NO. 100-10000
NO CHANGE IN CLASS
X DESIGNATED
CLASS CHANGE TO: 10-1-C
NEXT REVIEW DATE: 10-10-02
AUTO: HR 702
100-10000 10-10-02

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